Between Edges and Margins

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Between Edges and Margins: Exploring 'Ordinary' Young People's Experiences of the Everyday Antisocial

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Abstract

In an attempt to understand youth-related antisocial behaviour, UK social policy has typically sought answers from the edge; investigating the motivations of young people perpetrating deviant behaviour or exploring the experiences of victims. Equally polarised and sensationalist narratives are present in journalistic accounts, with Knight's Hood Rat and BBC documentary The Scheme both depicting the lives of young people in 'disadvantaged' neighbourhoods as on the margins of society. Drawing on ethnographic research conducted in a Scottish housing estate, this paper calls for a localised and situated approach to understanding 'the antisocial'. The empirical data shows that young people do not fit easily into the dualist categories of 'perpetrator' or 'victim'. Despite living in what could be classed an 'antisocial' place the majority of young people's everyday experiences were not spent on the margins but rather somewhere in-between, while their own identities were described as normal and unspectacular. The paper concludes by emphasising the value of research that situates understandings of 'the antisocial' within its everyday social context. This offers us the opportunity to take a broader analysis of young lives and crucially re-establish the connection between lives on the margins and the 'missing middle'.

Keywords: Antisocial Behaviour; Middling Youth; Social Class; Neighbourhood; Otherness

Introduction

> We wouldn't say we were Young Mental Banksiders or that. We are different people, we don't go out and cause trouble. No[t] everyone is like that. (Carolina, 16)

1.1 In an attempt to understand youth-related antisocial behaviour, UK social policy typically seeks answers from the edge; either by investigating the motivations of young people involved in such behaviour or by exploring the experiences of victims. Equally polarised and sensationalist narratives are present in journalism (e.g. Knight's (2011) *Hood Rat* and BBC documentary *The Scheme*) which depict the lives of young people in 'disadvantaged' neighbourhoods as on the margins of society. Correspondingly, it is the social housing estate which features as the site of these imagined marginal youth. Derived from laudable policy goals - understanding the consequences of antisocial behaviour and the motivations of its perpetrators - the result is a particular portrayal of what it is like to grow up in a deprived place. This enduring conceptualisation of 'the antisocial youth' versus 'the victimised young person' corresponds to Valentine's (1996: 587) proposition that childhood has typically been understood through the oppositional discourses of 'angels' and 'devils'.

1.2 Yet most young people's lives do not fit easily into the dualist categories of 'perpetrator' or 'victim', but fall somewhere in-between. As my respondent Carolina states, not everyone causes trouble, nor do they see themselves as victims of it. This middle position requires negotiation and maintenance. However, when successful, it enables these young people – referred to in this article as 'middling youths' - to lead ordinary, unexceptional lives in spite of the social problems around them. This 'missing middle' tell us much about how antisocial behaviour affects young lives in a broader way. Yet it is precisely these experiences which go untold (France 2007: 57), particularly in studies of working class families (Brown 1987: 1). Schwartz et al (1973: 288) referred to respectable working class youths as 'sociological terra incognita', who unless delinquent or excluded from school received little attention from research. With some notable exceptions (Hollingworth and Williams 2009; Roberts 2010; Yoon 2006), the absence of the 'middling youth' perspective has persisted, most notably in studies of crime and deviance.

1.3 Drawing from recent research on young people's own understandings of antisocial behaviour, this article offers a space for 'middling' voices to be heard. It reveals that while antisocial behaviour was their everyday reality, 'middling youths' saw their own lives and identities as 'normal'. While being normal was considered crucial for maintaining a position in the middle, normality also had significance for other groups of young people. Being normal, in other words, was not straightforwardly related to a position in the middle. Not only does this highlight an elasticity associated with feelings of normality, but also the similarities between 'middling' young people and those whose lives are routinely polarised.

Researching edges and margins: Antisocial social behaviour in the UK

2.1 Since the 1990s, the term 'antisocial behaviour' has become commonplace, featuring in government speeches and policies, media, and everyday talk. Young people, in particular, have come to be regarded as the principal perpetrators, a misconception fuelled through rhetoric dominated by unruly and disruptive youths. Annually, attitudinal surveys record an association between youth and antisocial behaviour. Both the British and Scottish Crime Surveys, for example, found 'teenagers' and 'young people hanging around' to be a very widely perceived 'problem' (Brown and Bolling 2007; Flatley et al 2008).

2.2 Accompanying the image of 'antisocial youth' has been a growing, albeit contradictory, consciousness of young people at risk from the antisocial. This imagining comes from the opposite edge of the antisocial spectrum, whereby young people are conceptualised with reference to their innocence, vulnerability and need for protection (James and Jenks 1996). Repeated studies confirm that young people are most likely to be victims of antisocial behaviour (e.g. Phillips et al 2009; Roe and Ashe 2008), while others have outlined the lasting and damaging effect it has on young lives (Hartless et al 1995; Loader 1996). Competing discourses about young people – with perpetrators on one hand and victims on the other - has driven the UK approach to antisocial behaviour. The consequence has been the relative neglect of structural and social issues, in favour of mechanisms designed to govern the conduct of individuals and groups. Acceptable behaviour contracts, dispersal powers, antisocial behaviour orders and intensive family support projects represent a fraction of the tools designed to deal with perpetrators and protect those 'at risk'.

2.3 Much research has addressed the inadequacies in this approach, focusing instead on the subtleties within young people's relationship to the antisocial. The Edinburgh Transitions Study (McAra and McVie 2000), for example, has demonstrated that the categories of victim and offender overlap, and that offending behaviour is something young people desist from as they age. Other work, mainly qualitative, has explored young people's own experiences of antisocial behaviour and the spatial marginalisation occurring as a consequence of policy interventions (Deuchar 2009; Goldsmith 2006; McIntosh 2008).

2.4 Notably these studies focused on those young people typified as having an active part to play in the antisocial. Moreover, they tend to be situated within marginalised social and economic contexts. While this work is critical, framing young people's relationship to antisocial behaviour through the lens of perpetrator/victim can contribute to polarised narratives about everyday life in a 'disadvantaged' housing estate. Statistically, antisocial behaviour may be concentrated within 'disadvantaged' areas, but the majority of young people's experiences are neither marginal nor extreme. Drawing on extensive quantitative data from Peterborough, Wikstrom et al (2012) found that a third of teenagers committed no crimes at all, while the vast majority of the rest had done so only occasionally. Although where a young person lived was an important factor in their involvement in crime, social settings influenced individuals differently. The study concluded that interactions between the person and their environment determined relationships to crime and antisocial behaviour, and regardless of their circumstances many young people were highly resistant to becoming involved in it. In their Teeside study, MacDonald and Marsh (2005) came to a similar conclusion: most young people, despite growing up in disadvantage, did not grow up disconnected. As Clement notes:

> The fact that so many other young people from these neighbourhoods tend to remain 'connected' is testament to the capabilities of human adaptability and consciousness, and it is, in fact, more remarkable than this tragic de-civilisation of the few (Clement 2000: 449).

2.5 Other work, largely focused on educational attainment, utilises 'ordinariness' to explore the diversity within young lives. Often overlooked, the 'ordinary kids' described by Brown, fall between dualistic categories of 'rems' and 'swots' (Brown 1987) or low and high achievers (Roberts 2012). Neither edgy nor marginal, the ordinary kid falls in between. An ordinary position in the middle is, however, not always straightforward. Jenkins (1983) highlighted the plurality of young men's identities, which enabled them to be 'lads' on one occasion and 'ordinary' the next. Other research has shown how young people use their spatial competence (Lefebvre 2002) and local knowledge to allay the negative aspects of life in a 'disadvantaged' place (Hill et al 2006).

2.6 These findings are counter to dualist representations of young people as perpetrator /victim. Not only do young people successfully inhabit a 'middle' ground between these categories, but these 'ordinary' stories tell us much about how young people navigate disadvantage. While there is a growing body of work looking more holistically at the diversity within and between young lives, Roberts (2012) has suggested that 'ordinary' stories remain underrepresented in youth studies. This, he suggests, may be because the experiences of groups occupying a 'middle ground' are socially and politically unproblematic, unexceptional and quite simply, uninteresting (Roberts 2012: 204). This is certainly true in the realm of policy. A recent YouGov/Barnardo's survey presented 'shocking' results. It concluded that British society casually condemns all children, with more than half the population (54%) thinking that children are beginning to behave like animals (YouGov and Barnardo's 2008). These findings may reflect populist attitudes towards young people, but the extent to which they are relevant to young people's everyday lives is uncertain.

2.7 The aim of this article, then, is to explore what the concept antisocial behaviour means to young people falling between the categories of 'perpetrator' and 'victim'. Rather than focus purely on those on the edge or in the margins, it looks at young people's everyday interactions with antisocial behaviour and in so doing produces a more rounded understanding of lives in a 'disadvantaged' place.

About the study

3.1 The research draws on an ESRC funded doctoral project, which explored how young people define and give meaning to the term antisocial behaviour. The study was situated in a housing estate – 'Robbiestoun' - on the outskirts of a Scottish city. The focus of a long term programme of demolition and new build, the area continues to suffer from a range of problems associated with 'disadvantaged' localities: above average crime rates, rising unemployment and poor levels of educational attainment. Robbiestoun provided an opportunity to contextualise young people's interactions with the antisocial with respect to their socio-economic circumstances.

3.2 The ethnographic project involved 14 months of youth work in a traditional youth club and a street-

based project. As well as participant observation, groups of young people were engaged in 'task based' activities including walkabouts, photo diaries and 'mapping' exercises. Methods were designed to engage young people in discussion about antisocial behaviour whilst avoiding abstract adult-led concepts. From this wider sample 39 in-depth interviews were conducted with participants aged between 12 and 25. The focus of the research upon antisocial behaviour was led by the broader research questions and as such has influenced the findings discussed below. However, the methodology was carefully designed so as to overcome bias. The term antisocial behaviour was, for example, avoided during the research. Activities and discussions were centred, instead, around general topics such as growing up in Robbiestoun, schools and friendships, and the places and spaces important to young people. This provided a route away from a simplistic categorisation of behaviours or activities as antisocial and also evaded values and labels in favour of a more 'neutral' starting point.

3.3 To explore the diverse relationships young people have with antisocial behaviour, the study involved a range of participants. A minority, such as the Bank Boys (discussed later), were defined, by themselves and others, through their involvement in crime and deviance. Another minority had experienced victimisation, most commonly through bullying or racism. This article, however, focuses on the 'middling' young people who were the majority of those involved in the project. These young people identified themselves as neither conformists nor troublemakers. Indeed, their narratives about school, friendships and involvement in crime revealed that their experiences and their identities fell somewhere in-between these two categories. While their lives 'in the middle' lacked the everyday drama, chaos and vulnerability of the minority groups, antisocial behaviour remained a salient and everyday issue.

'I suppose it's just life; you see it aw the time'

4.1 It was in the context of neighbourhood and place that 'middling' young people's relationship with antisocial behaviour was first revealed. Robbiestoun spans three distinct housing estates (Howard Brae, Orangebank and Owenvale) which historically have suffered from poor housing conditions, poverty and unemployment. Despite inward investment, accounts of place were dominated by concerns about the tenacity of stigma and the area's poor reputation. The neighbourhood, for instance, was frequently described as 'shite', 'rotten' or 'crap' (similar to the views encountered by Pickering et al 2012) while physical disorder, such as vandalism, poor quality housing, burnt out bins and loud music were frequently referred to during walkabouts and group discussions. The currency of antisocial behaviour within young people's lives is starkly represented in a poster designed by Amy (18) and Jules (16) in which they used collected objects to signify Robbiestoun. Their poster (Image 1) focused on drug abuse, while objects collected by other young people included empty bottles of alcohol, litter, techno music (representing partying and noisy neighbours) and newspaper articles featuring local criminality.

Image 1. Drugs and partying, a poster by Amy and Jules

4.2 Living in a 'shite' place went beyond what young people saw in the physical environment around them. While they complained about the quality of the environment, houses and gardens, physical disorder was only part of their wider understandings about where they lived and its social relationships. Robyn, for example, commented on Robbiestoun's regeneration programme:

> I know they have tried to paint the buildings, but COME ON, the same people still live in they buildings. (Robyn, 18)

4.3 Thus 'middling' young people constructed the neighbourhood as a 'problem' place, not only because it looked bad, but because it behaved badly. Jack (16) and Paul (19) narrated this idea by analysing why residents from Robbiestoun were 'different' from those living in other parts of the city:

> Paul: I don't think we have got the same sort of people really, [we have the] folk that take drugs or the partiers, the junkees and then we have got the criminals and the folk that are trying [illegally] to make money.
>
> Jack: Ken, they have got the grafter folk that just enjoy going out at the weekends drinking

in the pubs and working all week and that. It is different hey.

4.4 Robbiestoun folk were categorised as 'different' according to their lack of 'proper' employment, dodgy dealings and criminality. Others might 'graft' to enjoy the weekend; those from Robbiestoun are work shy, party hard and enjoy recreational drugs. This image relates directly to a social pathology where it is *other* local people who are responsible for the neighbourhood's 'antisocial' nature. These descriptions lend support to the familiar imaginings of the housing estate as a 'problem' place with 'problem' people (Damer 1989: 1).

4.5 In characterising Robbiestoun through 'schemies', 'junkees' and 'criminals', young people rehearse populist images and representations of the area. Indeed, many 'middling' youth recognised and experienced outsiders' views on the neighbourhood. Robyn's boyfriend, for example, refused to walk her home for fear of 'being jumped'. Amy, meanwhile, described being called a 'jake' (a derogatory term for a chronic alcoholic) because of where she lived. Young people recounted media stories about Robbiestoun's 'marauding youths' and 'yobs' who 'just don't care'. Local police made routine use of a callous phrase to describe the area, a term widely recognised across Robbiestoun and the wider city (the phrase cannot be reported without compromising the anonymity of Robbiestoun).

4.6 Wacquant (1999: 1644) argues that such 'discourses of demonisation' often have 'tenuous connections to the reality of everyday life in them'. However, popular narratives were not entirely imagined. Young people growing up in Robbiestoun faced real social issues and material disadvantage. Yet, for 'middling' young people this was evidently something to which they had grown accustomed (see also MacDonald et al 2005). Young people's everyday association to antisocial behaviour was hence downplayed as an expected, even normal, part of life. This normalisation is exemplified by Izzy, who, in spite of viewing drug dealing as 'horrible', felt that the 'bad' aspects of the neighbourhood were just something you get used to:

> It is horrible being in this area and seeing the drugs. They should take them somewhere else, like away from where we are being brought up. But other than that, I suppose it's just life; you see it aw the time. (Izzy, 15)

4.7 Here, an image of Robbiestoun as an 'antisocial' place is constructed, yet simultaneously physical disorder and deviant behaviour is rationalised as both ordinary and unexceptional. Moreover, while narratives about Robbiestoun were often framed negatively, these were generally situated within a broader, positive evaluation based on familiarity, family networks and supportive friendships. Quick to label Robbiestoun as an 'antisocial' place, it was implicit that 'middling' young people did not see this spoilt identity as applying to themselves: they were different. Whilst place and identity are powerfully connected (Green and White 2007: 93), the connection was multifaceted. 'Middling' young people simultaneously liked and disliked the neighbourhood; they were part of it, yet separate. In essence, they were able to choose the context to which they belonged.

Part of the 'normal' crowd

5.1 Multiple understandings of place framed how 'middling' youth thought about themselves and others around them (Green and White 2007). Throughout the research, 'being normal' emerged as a crucial form of identity. This is illustrated in the exercise below (Image 2), in which young people were invited to rank things they liked and disliked about Robbiestoun from one (the worst) to ten (the best). Here, 'middling' young people defined themselves as the 'normal crowd' and were positioned near the top of the ranking at number nine. 'Chavs' were placed at number three with 'geeks' deemed so low they 'were off the radar'.

5.2 As in Hollingworth and Williams' (2009) study of schools, groups were keen to describe themselves in opposition; not on the basis of what they are, but rather what they are not. A social continuum (see also Sutton 2009) was created with 'geeks' (conformists) and 'chavs' (troublemakers) at one end and 'the normal crowd' at the other. Through social ordering, 'middling' young people identified their place on the continuum according to normative understandings of 'us' and 'them' (Southerton 2002: 172).

Image 2. Results of 'what's hot and what's not' exercise (1 being the worst and 10 the best)

←WHAT'S NOT		WHAT'S HOT →	
1	**Geeks** (actually rated as below 1) High School	Amusement park (seasonal) Chip shop	10
2	The police Poundland	**The normal crowd** Your mate's house	9
3	**Chavs** Parents	Pizza Hut McDonalds	8
4	Football club	Going 'up town' Brothers and sisters	7
5	Iceskating	Cinema Aunts, uncles and grannies	6

5.3 This negotiation of normalcy was present in many aspects of 'middling' lives. Most commonly evoked was their relationship to 'bad' behaviour. The majority had been involved in activities such as vandalism, shoplifting, joyriding, drinking and smoking, cannabis use and fighting. However, this was sporadic, often occurring in the 'heat of the moment'. To forge a middling position, these young people immediately distinguished their 'playful' behaviour from deviant acts carried out by 'chavs' and 'neds':

> I go with the flow but obviously if I'm there and it's happening I wouldn't join in. I'm not saying I'm like an angel, but I'm just, as I say, quite well kept. (Jules, 16)

> I think it was easy [to stay out of trouble] because we are a sound group, just normal pals, we didn't want to cause any trouble. Not like other groups. (Gabrielle, 16)

5.4 While Jules is 'no angel', she differentiates herself from those who get involved in antisocial behaviour. In her words, she is 'well kept'. Gabrielle, likewise, considers her friends to be 'just normal', avoiding trouble wherever possible. Such comments sharply contrast the populist image of disruptive, unruly and 'feral' youth growing up in a housing estate. Instead, here we find young people not only critically reflecting on their behaviour, but regulating and managing it too.

5.5 Another important domain through which 'middling' youth set themselves apart was their friendships. They loved socialising and 'hanging out', and demonstrated skill in achieving this. This group not only sustained strong core friendships, but were equally content interacting with other peer groups. This ability to build a network of friends from different areas was a particular source of bridged social capital (Putnam 2000; Watt et al 1998):

> I'm really good at that [meeting people from different places]. I'm friends with people in Howard Brae, I'm friends with people in, like, Barlow [a neighbouring affluent area] and, like, all the surrounding areas and stuff. (Jules)

5.6 Notably, rivalries between Robbiestoun's micro-geographies did not prevent 'middling' young people seeking out new friendships, and indeed, a mix of peers was positively valued. This contrasts with the experiences of other young people for whom gangs and territorialism prevent open bonds (Deuchar 2009). One such group in Orangebank were the Bank Boys: around a dozen young males well known for their deviant and criminal behaviour. The Boys worked hard to maintain their group's exclusivity, exemplified through close association with the local Young Team[1] the 'Young Mental Banksiders' (or YMB). While this boundary acted as a protective force and a powerful source of identity, for 'middling' young people, maintaining a wide social network provided a buffer which allowed them to 'blend in':

> I think if you are part of your own group, you are encouraging people to have a go at you. And if you are part of a bigger group, you are just more or less, blending in instead of trying to stick out. (Robert, 14)

Representations of 'the other'

6.1 Jenkins (2008: 195) emphasises that 'defining normality codifies the abnormal and the socially unacceptable, reinforcing routinised and collectivised behaviours and discourses'. Likewise, my data shows how understandings of 'normality' became dependent upon the construction of the abnormal. Young people, such as the Bank Boys, were routinely summoned as an 'abnormal' other, alongside whom 'middling' youths could position themselves. Hall (2000) suggests that the 'other' carries a symbolic route to thinking about identity by creating a distance between oneself and those being othered. By identifying the risks associated with an 'outsider' a grid of social distinction and rules are established. This sets out lines of authority and difference in terms of how people behave with each other (Douglas 1992). Through construction of 'the other', groups sustain a sense of identity and coherence (Hacking 2003).

6.2 This theme was littered throughout the data, illustrated most starkly in young people's mental maps (Lynch 1977) of the local area. While their own lives were characterised as ordinary and unexceptional, this was contrasted against neighbouring areas considered worse than their own. Thus, Owenvale's young people stressed that while their area could be 'bad', it was not 'half as bad' as Howard Brae. Depicted in a variety of derogatory and stereotypical ways - 'smelly', 'shite', 'full of pure bampots' - Howard Brae was adopted as the significant 'other' against which their own area, and their own identity, was judged (see also Kearns and Parkinson 2001; MacDonald et al 2005). Significantly, young people from Orangebank mobilised similar judgements about Owenvale. While stereotyping did feed and reinforce social myths about place (Pickering 2001: 48), for the most part they were more imagined than real. They were not powerful enough to prevent, for example, 'middling' young people from Owenvale 'hanging out' with peers from Howard Brae.

6.3 Gill (2007: para 2.2) suggests that the abnormal 'other' is a tool for constructing social difference and a representation of that which is 'strange, threatening and uncertain'. Yet even those young people considered to be 'deviant', such as the Bank Boys, were not straightforwardly a source of fear. For several 'middling' youths, their 'deviant' counterparts were often a source of humour and ridicule. For example, Carolina and her friends discussed at length the Bank Boys failed attempt at stealing a police car. Deemed stupid and inept, the story was a great source of laughter. As their conversation moved forward they began to talk about how much 'trouble' the Bank Boys cause others. After much debate, the girls conceded that the Bank Boys were not necessarily a source of fear. They did, however, require careful negotiation:

> Carolina: Okay, okay, they don't cause trouble to us, but maybe they do cause trouble to other people.
>
> Lisa: they do!! It is 'cos we know them that they don't cause trouble to us.
>
> Interviewer: what do you think people from outside the area would think?
>
> Carolina: that they are horrible.
>
> Lisa: I think they would be intimidated by them, but at the same time they might not do because they are only [aged]14-15 but there is a lot of them.

Gabrielle: but those people DO cause a lot of trouble.

Carolina: sometimes I feel weird walking past them.

Lisa and Gabrielle together: SAME

Carolina: with other people I feel alright.

6.4 On a geographical scale, young people in Robbiestoun live close lives. They attend the same schools, the same youth clubs and walk the same streets. The spatial reality of everyday life meant that young people had to carefully negotiate and maintain their position in the middle. So, while Carolina and her friends may see themselves as socially distant from the Bank Boys, they are vigilant in maintaining friendly relations with them. Like Robert, they aimed to 'blend in'. This enabled them to continue navigating the social and geographic spaces they enjoy, minimise risk and in turn, ensure their middling status.

Strategies for staying in the middle

7.1 The construction of 'normal' is an on-going process (Gill 2007: para 2.1) which young people must 'work' to maintain. The notion of 'blending in' did not simply relate to the friends you had, but also having the 'right' gear. Some clothing brands were considered 'trampy', whilst others could elevate your status. Yet self-presentation depended on more than clothing. Baz, for example, spoke about the bodywork required to ensure that he was not seen as a 'swot'. By removing his glasses and taking up football he reasserted his masculinity and ensured a 'middle' position with his peers. Here, his narrative is not confined to looking 'right', but also behaving 'right':

> If you look like disgusting, then you have not got a chance. You have to, like, if you like fit in, well, I used to have glasses and I didn't play football or anything. And I got rid of my glasses and started football. I was, like, pals with everybody. (Baz, 14)

7.2 Another common strategy for staying in the middle was described as 'keeping yur heid doon' (similar to Hill et al's (2006: 46) 'keeping a low profile'). This was not a response to fear, but rather represented the sophisticated ways in which young people used knowledge about their everyday environments as a means of constructing and minimising risk (Hill et al 2006: 45). The local cycle path, for instance, was frequently used by 'middling' young people to navigate the different parts of Robbiestoun. While the path, especially at night, was deemed 'risky', this was balanced against the more concrete fear of 'getting a doing' from someone in a neighbouring estate. Harden et al (2000: 14) refer to this process of managing risk based on personal experiences and local knowledge as 'landscapes of risk'. These landscapes, they conclude, are not objectively determined but rather contingent on a host of contextual factors, such as time, space, people and actions:

> Interviewer: OK. So would you go to Howard Brae?
>
> Baz: I would go, but no on my own. I wouldn't go there when it was dark, I wouldn't go. I am not scared of it, but it is like a dodgy place, I wouldn't just walk about there.

7.3 While environmental conditions, such as darkness or isolation, were highlighted as indicators of risk, more often it was the people within these locations that made them 'dodgy'. Micro-geographies, even individual blocks of housing, were associated with 'risky' individuals, groups or families. As one of Robert's friends commented:

> You need to think about where you are going, you can't go down a street just not caring. You need to know what peoples are down there. (Female, group discussion)

7.4 Notably a minority of young people did avoid both places and people for fear of being victimised. However, 'middling' young people were able to mobilise local knowledge and social contacts so as to minimise perceived risk. For instance, Carolina and her friends used their ability to socialise across groups to form a protective and civil association with the Bank Boys. Baz, likewise, used his friendship with a sister of one of the Bank Boys as a form of social currency. 'Middling' young people did not sever connections with the 'abnormal' other, but saw them as an essential part of their everyday social networks.

Normality as a form of difference

8.1 Hacking (2003: 169) notes that 'the normal stands indifferently for what is typical, the unexceptional, the unenthusiastic objective average' and to some extent, in this study, this rang true. Actively comparing themselves, their families and their friends to 'others' around them, the 'middling' young person was able to construct a profile of what it meant to be typical (or in their terms 'normal'). This 'respectable' working class identity was then positioned between the deviant or 'antisocial' elements of the neighbourhood and those defined as 'geeky' and 'swotty'. Interestingly, though, 'normality' was not straightforwardly constructed as typical or average. Rather, in the context of Robbiestoun it was considered a form of difference. Robyn, for example, moved out of the neighbourhood in her late teens and attributed this as being the point when her sense of normality shifted. Having moved away, she could now see the area's deprivation and 'depressing' environment, which before had been 'normal':

> Had I still lived in it [Robbiestoun], I would have just thought that was normal. But because of where I live now […] You know, it [her new neighbourhood] just feels like … it is another way of life. (Robyn)

8.2 Several others also expressed their own normal identity as being different from others around them. Jules, for instance, voiced strong a desire to leave Robbiestoun once she was old enough, arguing that she expected 'more' from herself. Here, success or 'getting on' was immutably linked to 'getting away' (Green and White 2007: 91). Normal here was not unenthusiastically average, but rather based on aspirations to rise above the disadvantage imposed by the area:

> I don't know, I see more, I expect more from myself [than others in Robbiestoun]. I like that, it's good. (Jules)

8.3 Likewise, Robert connected his ability to 'do well' with leaving Orangebank. Here he uses the concept of 'infection' to describe those who had lived in the area all their lives and for whom disadvantage becomes normalised and, as a result, aspirations squashed:

> I don't want to be here. I want to get away from here 'cos I think if you stay here all your life you get, like if you stay in Orangebank, you can get, like, sort of, infected. It sounds like strange. You get sort of, part of it, you can't leave and you don't know what it is like to be out of it. (Robert)

This is the middle from where I'm standing

9.1 We return then to the notion of 'normal' as being part of a social continuum, where 'the middle' depends upon your position relative to others. Thus, you might define yourself as normal or ordinary, but that definition depends on who, and what, you are comparing yourself against. Young people, like Robyn, suggested that your place on the continuum - your middle ground - is a product of your upbringing, your surroundings and your wider social relations. In other words, you act and behave in line with the typical practices, behavioural standards and social norms of the people in your neighbourhood with whom you most closely identify (Rodger 2006: 135). While none of the young people spoke explicitly about class (see also Nayak 2006), it remains, as Savage et al (2001: 883) contend, an important 'connecting device' through which young people locate themselves.

9.2 Young people articulately described elements of their everyday lives which fitted into the nebulous policy concept of antisocial behaviour. These, in turn, had a close relationship to understandings of social class. Class was frequently implied through 'moral euphemism(s)' (Skeggs 2005: 965) such as 'schemie', 'infection', 'chavs' and 'trampy'. Such terms served to 'class' certain groups as inferior and pathological and re-establish their own 'respectable' status. This raises the question then of how young people standing at a different point in the social continuum define 'being normal'? The short answer is in just the same way. Bank Boy member Jim (21) emphasised that the term antisocial was meaningless to him. Whilst he recognised social disorder in Robbiestoun, he defended it as being part of who he was:

> I'll be honest with you it's, I wonder what it [antisocial behaviour] is as well, because I see in the papers and I see like yobs, hoodies, antisocial behaviour and all that. And I'm like, fuck youse, this is my world, hey, this is where I'm from. And somebody getting their window smashed on a Friday night or a fight in the streets just Friday, hey, that just happens. (Jim)

9.3 Bradley (mid-teens) also found the term antisocial behaviour difficult to understand, instead suggesting that deviant behaviour was, in fact, what constituted normal behaviour for Robbiestoun:

> Everything is too PC these days. Deviant, everyone is deviant in this area, you know goes oot drinking, smoking, taking stuff [drugs]. They are oot for a good laugh and that is what everyone does around here. (Bradley)

9.4 While the Bank Boys defined themselves within a culture in which deviance was normalised, like the 'middling youths', they too constructed a more deviant 'other' to reinforce their own version of normality. This 'other' was the 'junkee', a derogatory caricature of the heroin user. While the Bank Boys own use of cannabis, speed and ecstasy was deemed 'normal', heroin addicts were described as 'scum', 'nothings' and 'no-bodies'. One Bank Boy, Matthew (17), was 'sickened' by the people he had grown up with who were now, as he put it, 'total smack heads'. Along with the rest of the group, he distanced himself from heroin and those using it.

9.5 The final source I wish to draw on is Bernie (15), sister of a Bank Boy. We met on the street one evening and we talked about her aspirations for the future. She had no plans for employment or training, but was clear that her future remained in Orangebank:

> Bernie: what, can you see me? What, living in a posh area? No, no. I wouldn't survive, I would just end up nutting [head-butting] someone and where would I end up? Back here!
>
> Interviewer: What do you mean posh? Where are the posh areas?
>
> Bernie: you know, big hooses [houses], big cars, all the places up toon.
>
> Interviewer: So if they are posh, what are you?
>
> Bernie: Me? Well, I'm just normal.

9.6 Here the point of comparison, the 'other' against which oneself is measured, differs from that of 'middling' young people. What is defined as deviance is redefined here as normal. 'The antisocial', likewise, is recast as social. Thus, while the objective presence of antisocial behaviour in Robbiestoun is not contested, what this behaviour means and represents is different. Here it is accepted as part of who they are. Lawler (1999: 4) suggests that class inequality is reproduced by 'making working class subjectivities pathological'. Conversely, for Bernie, it is 'poshness' which is conceived as the inferior 'other' against which her version of normal is compared. Sayer (2002: para 5.2) suggests that individuals 'may take pride in lacking the pretensions and affections associated with insulation from economic necessity'. 'Being posh' did not simply equate to material inequalities, but also to particular styles, habits and behaviours. For Bernie and the Bank Boys, it was these characteristics which were atypical, while their own was unexceptional and ordinary.

So, what is normal anyway?

10.1 It is clear that antisocial behaviour is a powerful image in the minds of 'middling' young people growing up in a 'disadvantaged' place. It helps to shape and frame their relationships with the physical environment and, more importantly, the social spaces of their everyday lives. Crucially, behaviours and people considered antisocial became a point of reference through which 'normality' was invoked. A rhetoric of 'us' and 'them' was mobilised, enabling the creation of symbolic boundaries between 'normal' young people and 'antisocial' others. The data also revealed the existence of an additional 'other': the 'geeks' and 'swots'. These young people, often victims of bullying and harassment, were positioned in

opposition to 'antisocial' young people. Stereotyping of groups considered 'abnormal', for instance 'the chav', 'the geek' and 'the bampot', all provide extreme versions of 'the other' against whom 'middling' young people's ordinariness could be compared.

10.2 The construction of symbolic boundaries presumes an oppositional framework of inclusion and exclusion (Southerton 2002: 175). In other words the very act of defining 'us' necessarily excludes 'them' (Jenkins 2008). Yet the boundaries between social groups were by no means fixed or unchangeable. On the one hand, 'middling' young people recognised the Robbiestoun identity as 'spoilt' (Goffman 1968) and sought to dis-identify from it by locating themselves within what they considered the 'normal crowd'. On the other, this presentation of a 'normal' self did not result in 'middling' young people segregating themselves. While social distance existed in the everyday relationships between 'middling' young people and their 'abnormal' counterparts, there was also 'spatial proximity' (Allen et al 2007). Young people, then, did not operate in bounded peer groups but mixed at school, in youth clubs and in shared public arenas (such as the local shops and street corners). Indeed, 'middling' young people prided themselves in their ability to form outwardly looking peer relations.

10.3 Moreover, young people's relationship with space and place were highly complex. Narratives about Robbiestoun were often framed negatively; however, these were generally situated within a wider context in which young people valued positive social bonds and attachments. Unlike those in Holligan and Deuchar's (2001: 69) research, these 'middling' young people were not socially split. It would seem, then, that the significance of 'the other' lies not in its ability to divide or exclude, but rather in its role in identity construction (Petersoo 2007: 119). Only by recognising what they were not could 'middling' young people position themselves, and their own identities, accordingly.

10.4 A key aspects of 'middling' young people's ideas of being normal was their ability to rise above the stigma attached to Robbiestoun and focused on desire to leave before becoming, as Robert puts it, 'infected'. This implies agency, with 'middling' young people pro-actively seeking to define, negotiate and make sense of their expected futures. Post-cultural studies have suggested that class is becoming looser and less relevant, emphasising instead processes of individualisation and the freedom to construct one's own identity (Miles 2000; Redhead 1990; Thornton 1995). This postmodern identity avoids being fixed to a specific identity, place or relationship (Bauman 1995: 88). However, the data has clearly demonstrated that young people's experiences and understandings of self invariably continue to be influenced by structural factors as much as by personal agency (Holland et al 2007; Thomson et al 2004). The 'middling' young people utilised processes of 'othering' to disassociate themselves from Robbiestoun's spoilt identity and, in turn, sustain their version of being normal and ordinary. Ordinariness is then, as Savage et al suggest, used as a strategy through which to avoid social fixing:

> By being ordinary, people try to claim to be just themselves and not socially fixed people who are not 'real' individuals but rather social ciphers (Savage et al 2001: 889).

10.5 The young people I spoke with preferred the term 'disadvantaged' to describe Robbiestoun since it indicated an external force. In other words, there was no fault inherent within them but rather the problem lay within the area's social-economic structure. 'Disadvantage' was something they believed could be overcome and most had expectations of social mobility or, in their words, 'success'. Whether these expectations will be realised is yet to be determined. The 'middling' young people involved in this study are still working to overcome disadvantage, concentrating their efforts on school, college and volunteering. At least one had found work within a family support project in the local area. This group may, as Sayer et al (2001: 889) suggest, seek to escape social fixing by way of ordinariness. Unlike the Bank Boys this ordinariness was outward looking and attributed value to diverse social networks. However, class and place not only remains an important part of 'middling' young people's identities, but are also likely to be key factors in shaping their future ambitions.

10.6 These findings have practical consequences. Until now, interventions designed for tackling antisocial behaviour have focussed on individual 'problem' behaviour. This has led to dominant understandings of antisocial behaviour focussing on the perspective of perpetrators or victims. The majority of young people, whose experiences cannot be neatly fitted into these categories, are neglected. Thus our knowledge is 'more of a patchwork than a coherent whole' (Roberts 2012: 204). This study has shown the importance of thinking holistically about antisocial behaviour within its everyday context. While 'middling youths' were neither conformists or troublemakers, antisocial behaviour remained closely connected to their daily lives, feelings about their neighbourhood, friendships and their own identity. Crucially, antisocial behaviour was understood not simply in terms of individual behaviour, but as an expression of economic inequality, poverty and material disadvantage.

10.7 Finally, the data revealed variation and diversity in how young people define and give meaning to the concept antisocial. Being 'antisocial' and being 'normal' are essentially relational, based on your own place on the social continuum. Efforts to engage with antisocial behaviour in local neighbourhoods must begin by re-appraising what is considered antisocial, not by policy makers, but by those living in the places experiencing these issues. Only then can we begin to find and deliver workable solutions.

Notes

[1]The term 'young team' is employed across Scotland as a means of giving identity to a group. These generally relate to a specific geographical area and are identified by a three letter acronym (i.e. YMB).

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